



Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA)

Making your Grant Proposal Competitive



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- Read the Request for Grant Proposal (RFGP) and application instructions thoroughly before writing proposal.
- Understand what you read.



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- During the RFGP open period, discuss your program ideas with the ECA program officer identified in the RFGP.
- For overseas programs, discuss with Public Affairs Section representatives at U.S. embassies in the participating countries.



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- Tailor your proposal to the RFGP.
- Review stated goals and objectives of the program:
 - Do they compliment your organization's goals and objectives?
 - If yes, explain how the program will compliment your efforts and why the program would be of benefit to the Department of State.



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- ECA believes successful “Exchange Programs” benefit both foreign & U.S. audiences.
- If you can demonstrate this, your proposal will likely be viewed more competitively.



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- Write your proposal clearly – rambling, misspellings, bad grammar all leave a bad impression.
- If using a boilerplate, check to make sure all parts are relevant to the specific competition for which you are applying.
- Have someone not associated with the writing of the proposal review it.



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Make your proposal stand out. Be creative when addressing the objectives.

- Show your commitment.
- Show your enthusiasm.
- Show your good ideas.
- Show your vigor.



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Avoid:

- Platitudes
- Generalities
- Self-promotion

Be Specific – identify and address:

- All required program components
- Orientations
- Training agendas
- Sample schedules
- Letters of endorsement



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Demonstrate your experience & expertise:

- List accomplishments
- Show a positive track record
- Be honest about “lessons learned” from coordinating past exchange or international training programs
- Take credit for problems encountered and addressed



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If a competition is specific to a geographical region or program theme:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the regional and/or issues in your narrative
- Highlight institutional expertise
- Highlight staff expertise



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If your organization is new to exchanges or lacks expertise:

- Consider a partnership with a more experienced organization
- But remember to delineate each partner's responsibilities in the proposal

Include samples of past program:

- Outlines
- Schedules
- Evaluations/endorsements



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Make sure your narrative addresses each of the published review criteria:

1. Diversity
2. Program evaluation
3. Cost-effectiveness/cost sharing
4. Follow-on activities
5. Project planning/ability to achieve program objectives



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1. Diversity – Does your proposal:
 - * Advance the principle of diversity? “Diversity” includes different ethnicities, races, genders, religions, geographical locations, socio-economic status, and people with disabilities.
 - * Include a program topic related to diversity?
 - * Include diverse participants, employees, program volunteers?
 - * Discuss diversity matters?
 - * Represent your program’s geographic, cultural, and ethnic diversity? *Think broadly & creatively.*



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2. Program evaluation plan should include:

- * What is measurable?
- * What are the proposed outcomes?
- * Who will measure or evaluate these outcomes and what are their qualifications?
- * Does evaluation take place both during the project and after its completion?
- * How will the evaluation be reported to the Bureau?
- * Does your proposal include sample evaluation forms?



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3. Cost-effectiveness/cost sharing –

- * Keep administrative funds to a minimum.
- * Contribute as much-cost sharing as possible, including “non-cash” contributions. If the RFGP requires a minimum amount of cost-sharing and a maximum limit on admin, make sure your budget meets these requirements.
- * Make sure your budget submission is clear and specific, and totals up correctly.
- * Submit your budget in the proper format. The Proposal Submission Instructions (PSI) contains information on budget format and allowable expenses.



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4. Follow-on activities

Have you clearly demonstrated how your project will continue after Federal support has ended?

How will you continue to engage the program participants?



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5. Project planning/ability to achieve program objectives

Be sure to explain how you will undertake the necessary tasks to fulfill the project's goals. These include but are not limited to participant selection and placement, program monitoring, language issues, and fiscal management.

A willingness to engage the U.S. embassy in the final selection of participants strengthens a proposal.



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Does your proposal meet all the technical requirements of the RFGP? Did you...

- Complete the required application forms?
- Include current resumes?
- Include financial reports? (IRS tax-exempt status?)
- Include supporting recommendations/letters of reference?
- Obtain necessary organizational sign-offs/signatures?
- Keep your narrative within the allowable page limit?
- Include correct number of copies?



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REMEMBER:

Funding for most ECA grant competitions is limited and the number of eligible proposals usually exceeds available funding.

Competition is Stiff – If your proposal is not funded, the ECA program office will provide you with details on why your proposal was unsuccessful. Many unsuccessful proposals are improved upon and funded the second time around.